

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8785

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 17696

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: ITALIAN COMMUNISTS PREPARE FOR PARTY CONGRESS

SUMMARY: THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) CENTRAL COMMITTEE (CC) MEETING (DECEMBER 10-12) SET THE STAGE FOR A PARTY CONGRESS TO BE HELD IN ROME MARCH 18-23.

A REPORT BY PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL ENRICO BERLINGUER OUTLINED A DETAILED PCI PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE. BERLINGUER STRESSED IN THE CLEAREST MANNER TO DATE THE PCI'S CANDIDACY FOR A ROLE IN THE GOVERNING PROCESS. COMING AS IT DID AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE RECENT GOVERNMENT CRISIS, THE CC MEETING REPRESENTED A RETURN OF THE PCI TO THE POLITICAL OFFENSIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING A THREE DAY CC MEETING HELD IN ROME DECEMBER 10-12, THE PCI FORMALLY DECIDED TO CONVENE A PARTY CONGRESS DURING THE PERIOD MARCH 18-23. THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN FOLLOWING THE RESOLUTION OF THE RECENT GOVERNMENT CRISIS AND BASED ON THE PCI BELIEF THAT PRESSURE FOR EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS HAD RECEDED.

2. THE PRINCIPAL ITEM ON THE AGENDA OF THE CC MEETING WAS A REPORT BY BERLINGUER DESIGNED TO OPEN THE PARTY DEBATE ON THE ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE FORTHCOMING CONGRESS.

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BERLINGUER'S LENGTHY REPORT, PUBLISHED IN FULL IN L'UNITA

DECEMBER 11, REPRESENTED THE CLEAREST PUBLIC EXPOSITION OF THE PCI'S PROGRAM YET HEARD.

3. BERLINGUER USED THE OCCASION OF THE CC TO STRESS IN THE BOLDEST TERMS TO DATE THE PARTY'S CANDIDACY FOR A ROLE IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNING PROCESS. REFERRING TO THE IDEA OF THE COMPROMESSO STORICO, WHICH HE FIRST FORMALLY ADVANCED IN THE FALL OF 1973, BERLINGUER NOTED THAT QTE THE DIRECT PARTICIPATION OF THE PCI IN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONSTITUTE A QUALITATIVE CHANGE IN THE FORM AND THE METHODS OF THE POLITICAL DIRECTION AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE, IN THE GENERAL CLIMATE OF THE COUNTRY, AND IN THE ATTITUDE OF THE WORKERS TOWARD PUBLIC POWER. END QUOTE. ARGUING THAT PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES RATHER THAN PARTY POLITICS REQUIRE THAT THE PCI ENTER THE GOVERNMENT AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE TIME, BERLINGUER TOLD THE CC MEETING THAT QUOTE WE HAVE SAID AND WE REPEAT THAT AS A PARTY WE HAVE NO HURRY. THE URGENCY COMES FROM THE FACT THAT AS EVENTS OF RECENT YEARS DEMONSTRATED, EACH DELAY IN INITIATING A DEMOCRATIC TURN PROVOKES IN THE COUNTRY DAMAGE ALWAYS MORE GRAVE AND INCREASES THE DANGERS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC REGIME. END QUOTE.

4. TURNING TO RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTIES, BERLINGUER STRESSED THE NEED TO ESTABLISH POSITIVE RELATIONS WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC) CITING THIS AS QUOTE WITHOUT DOUBT AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF OUR VISION OF THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ITALY. END QUOTE. BERLINGUER CALLED FOR A QUOTE FRANK DISCUSSION END QUOTE BETWEEN THE PCI AND THE ITALIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSI) IN ORDER TO ADVANCE THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A HIGHER MEASURE OF UNITY WITHIN THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT. BERLINGUER ALSO OFFERED AN OLIVE BRANCH IN THE DIRECTION OF OTHER PARTIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC SPECTRUM (THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, THE LIBERALS, AND THE REPUBLICANS).

5. IN CALLING FOR QUOTE A NEW TYPE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT END QUOTE, BERLINGUER SET FORTH A PROPOSED PROGRAM OF REFORMS WHICH WENT, IN TERMS OF SPECIFIC PROPOSALS, SUBSTANTIALLY BEYOND PREVIOUS PUBLIC PROCLAMATIONS OF THE PARTY. AMONG THE PROPOSALS HE ADVANCED WERE ONES CALLING FOR REFORMS IN THE AGRICULTURAL, TRANSPORT, CONSTRUCTION AND INDUSTRIAL SECTORS

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AS WELL AS ONE CALLING FOR THE REDUCTION OF UNPRODUCTIVE GOVERNMENTAL EXPENSES. BERLINGUER STRESSED THAT THE PCI'S PROPOSALS QUOTE DO NOT IN THE LEAST IMPLY NATIONALIZATION OF THE ENTIRE ECONOMY. END QUOTE.

6. NOTING THE NEED FOR A PROFOUND RENEWAL AND STRENGTHENING OF PUBLIC LIFE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE, BERLINGUER CALLED FOR A MORE EFFICIENT FUNCTIONING OF THE PARLIAMENT,

INCLUDING A REORGANIZATION OF THE DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE TWO CHAMBERS AND A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS IN EACH BODY. ALSO ON THE INTERNAL SCENE, BERLINGUER'S REPORT PROPOSED INTER ALIA MODIFYING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, DEFINING MORE PRECISELY ITEMS WHICH CAN BE SUBMITTED TO NATIONAL REFERENDUM, INCREASING THE POWERS OF THE REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS, REFORMING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, AND ENSURING THAT MILITARY AND STATE SECURITY FORCES REMAIN RESPONSIBLE TO DEMOCRATICALLY CONSTITUTED LEADERSHIP AS PROVIDED BY THE CONSTITUTION.

7. ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE, THE REPORT PROPOSED FOR ITALY A POLICY OF QUOTE NATIONAL AUTONOMY END QUOTE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE DETENETE PROCESS. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE PROCESS OF DETENTE PERMITS THE ABOLITION OF MILITARY BLOCS, BERLINGUER NOTED THAT IT QUOTE IS UNREALISTIC TO THINK OF THE EVENTUALITY OF THE UNILATERAL EXIT OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES FROM ONE PACT OR THE OTHER (NATO OR WARSAW) END QUOTE. AT THE SAME TIME HE SUPPORTED ITALY'S CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY ALTHOUGH HE NOTED THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIZATION OF ITS BODIES AND FOR A REDUCTION OF THE POWER OF MONOPOLISTIC NATIONAL AND MULTINATIONAL GROUPS WITHIN IT.

8. IN SEVERAL PASSAGES THROUGHOUT THE REPORT, BERLINGUER OBLIQUELY TOOK NOTE OF THE PCI FEELING THAT THE AMERICAN NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PARTY REMAINS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES TO ITS ENTERING THE GOVERNING ARENA. WHILE ON THE ONE HAND CONDEMNING ALL US ATTEMPTS TO INTERVENE IN THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, BERLINGUER'S REPORT ALSO SEEMINGLY SUGGESTED PCI AWARENESS THAT IT MUST ATTEMPT TO SELL ITSELF TO THE US AS A RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL FORCE THAT REPRESENTS NO THREAT TO AMERICAN INTERESTS IN ITALY. THE
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REPORT STRESSES THE NEED QUOTE TO TURN TO DEMOCRATIC FORCES IN THE US -- AND THIS IS A TASK THAT EVEN WE COMMUNISTS MUST PURSUE -- TO MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND THE EFFECTIVE REALITY OF ITALIAN POLITICS AND, AT THE SAME TIME, THE REASONS FOR WHICH THERE ARE NONE AMONG THE MAJOR FORCES OF ITALIAN POLITICS WHO WISH OUR COUNTRY TO PURSUE A LINE OF HOSTILITY

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TOWARD AMERICAN. END QUOTE.

9. IN A SECTION ESTABLISHING THE THEORETICAL CREDENTIALS OF THE PARTY, THE REPORT PAID AMPLE TRIBUTE TO THE ROLE THE USSR HAS PLAYED IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT. HE SHARPLY CRITICIZED CHINA FOR PERMITTING IMPERIALIST POWERS TO PLAY PEKING OFF AGAINST MOSCOW AND STATED THE PCI CONSIDERS IT QUOTE ABSURD AND HARMFUL THAT A SOCIALIST COUNTRY SUCH AS CHINA PLACES ON THE SAME LEVEL THE US AND ANOTHER SOCIALIST COUNTRY SUCH AS THE SOVIET UNION. END QUOTE.

10. SUMMARIES OF SPEECHES MADE DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE ON THE REPORT REVEAL VIRTUALLY NO PUBLIC DIFFERENCES WITH THE GENERAL LINES IT PROPOSED FOR THE PARTY. HOWEVER, SOME EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT DEBATE CONTINUES WITHIN THE PCI ON THE VALIDITY AND/OR PACE OF THE MOVEMENT ON THE COMPROMESSO STORICO. A JOURNALIST (WITH SOCIALIST LEANINGS) MENTIONED TO US HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT PRESSURE FROM YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE PCI HAD LED BERLINGUER TO TAKE A MORE AGGRESSIVE POSTURE ON THE COMPROMESSO STORICO OVER THE OPPOSITION OF CERTAIN SENIOR PARTY LEADERS.

11. COMMENT: BERLINGUER'S REPORT, WHICH REPRESENTED HIS FIRST MAJOR POLITICAL PRONOUNCEMENT SINCE HIS SPEECH TO THE L'UNITA
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FESTIVAL IN BOLOGNA LAST SEPTEMBER, MARKED THE RETURN OF THE PCI TO THE POLITICAL OFFENSIVE FOLLOWING THE RESOLUTION OF THE RECENT GOVERNMENT CRISIS. AS THE PARTY WITH THE MOST POTENTIAL

FOR GAIN THE DETERIORATING ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION, THE PCI'S EFFORTS DURING THE CRISIS WERE CENTERED ON DEMONSTRATING ITS RESPONSIBILITY AS A DEMOCRATIC FORCE ON THE POLITICAL SCENE. APPARENTLY PREFERRING TO AVOID THE PROSPECTS OF AN EARLY NATIONAL ELECTION IN WHICH THE COMMUNIST ISSUE COULD BE THE CENTRAL THEME (THEREBY INTRODUCING NEW FRICTIONS BETWEEN THE PCI AND THE DC, THEIR PROPOSED MAJOR PARTNER IN THE COMPROMESSO STORICO), THE PCI DENOUNCED ALL MOVES THAT SMACKED OF EFFORTS TO MOVE TOWARD DISSOLUTION OF THE PARLIAMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, FOR THE DURATION OF THE CRISIS, THEIR PROPOSAL FOR A COMPROMESSO STORICO WAS PLACED ON THE BACK BURNER IN AN ATTEMPT TO DEFUSE THE QUESTION OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PCI AS AN ISSUE IN A CLOUDED POLITICAL SITUATION.

12. FORMATION OF THE MORO TWO-PARTY COALITION WAS PROBABLY NOT AS FAVORABLE A RESOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL CRISIS, IN THE PCI'S VIEW, AS MORO'S ORIGINALLY ATTEMPTED ONE-PARTY DC GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE BEEN. HOWEVER, THE TWO-PARTY GOVERNMENT CONSIDERABLY REDUCED THE PROSPECTS OF EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND INCREASED THE CHANCES THAT THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS, IN WHICH THE PCI STRATEGISTS EXPECT TO MAKE RESPECTABLE GAINS, WILL BE HELD NEXT SPRING AS SCHEDULED. THIS RESULT CAN ONLY BE WELCOME TO THE PCI LEADERSHIP. SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPROMESSO STORICO IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNING BODIES WOULD, UNDOUBTEDLY, BE WHAT THE PCI LEADERSHIP (AND MANY ITALIANS) VIEW AS THE NEXT FURTHER STEP IN THE PARTY'S MOVEMENT, INEXORABLE, AS THEY SEE IT, TOWARD A SHARE OF THE ACTION ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

13. THE ABSENCE OF CRITICAL DEBATE DURING THE CC MEETING DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PCI CONGRESS WILL BE STAGNANT AFFAIR. EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT DIFFERENCES DO EXIST WITHIN THE PARTY ON KEY ISSUES SUCH AS THE COMPROMESSO STORICO. FOR EXAMPLE, A RECENT POLL COMMISSIONED BY CORRIERE DELLA SERA (ROME 17550), AND PUBLISHED IN THE DECEMBER 8 ISSUE, INDICATES THAT WHILE 60 PERCENT OF THE PCI MEMBERS POLLED FAVOR THE COMPROMESSO STORICO, A FULL 21 PERCENT OPPOSE THE CONCEPT AND 19 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION. TO THE EXTENT THESE DIFFERING

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VIEWPOINTS REPRESENT VIABLE POSITIONS WITHIN THE PARTY, THEY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO SURFACE AT THE CONGRESS IN MARCH WHEN A GREATER CROSS-SECTION OF THE MEMBERSHIP WILL BE REPRESENTED AND INVOLVED IN THE DEBATE.

14. MEANWHILE, THE PCI CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP ITS IMAGE AS A RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL FORCE READY TO PARTICIPATE IN SERIOUS EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE MOUNTING PROBLEMS FACING THE COUNTRY. AS BERLINGUER'S REPORT SUGGESTS, THE PCI IS PREPARED TO SEEK ACCOMMODATIONS WITH THE DEMOCRATIC

PARTIES OF THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SPECTRUM. AT THE SAME TIME,
IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT THE PCI WILL UTILIZE AVAILABLE
OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE ITS EFFORTS TO REASSURE THE US THAT
ITS INTERESTS IN ITALY WOULD NOT BE MEASURABLE THREATENED BY
COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNING PROCESS. VOLPE

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